

CASS, LEWIS

DRAWER 102

CONTEMPORARIES

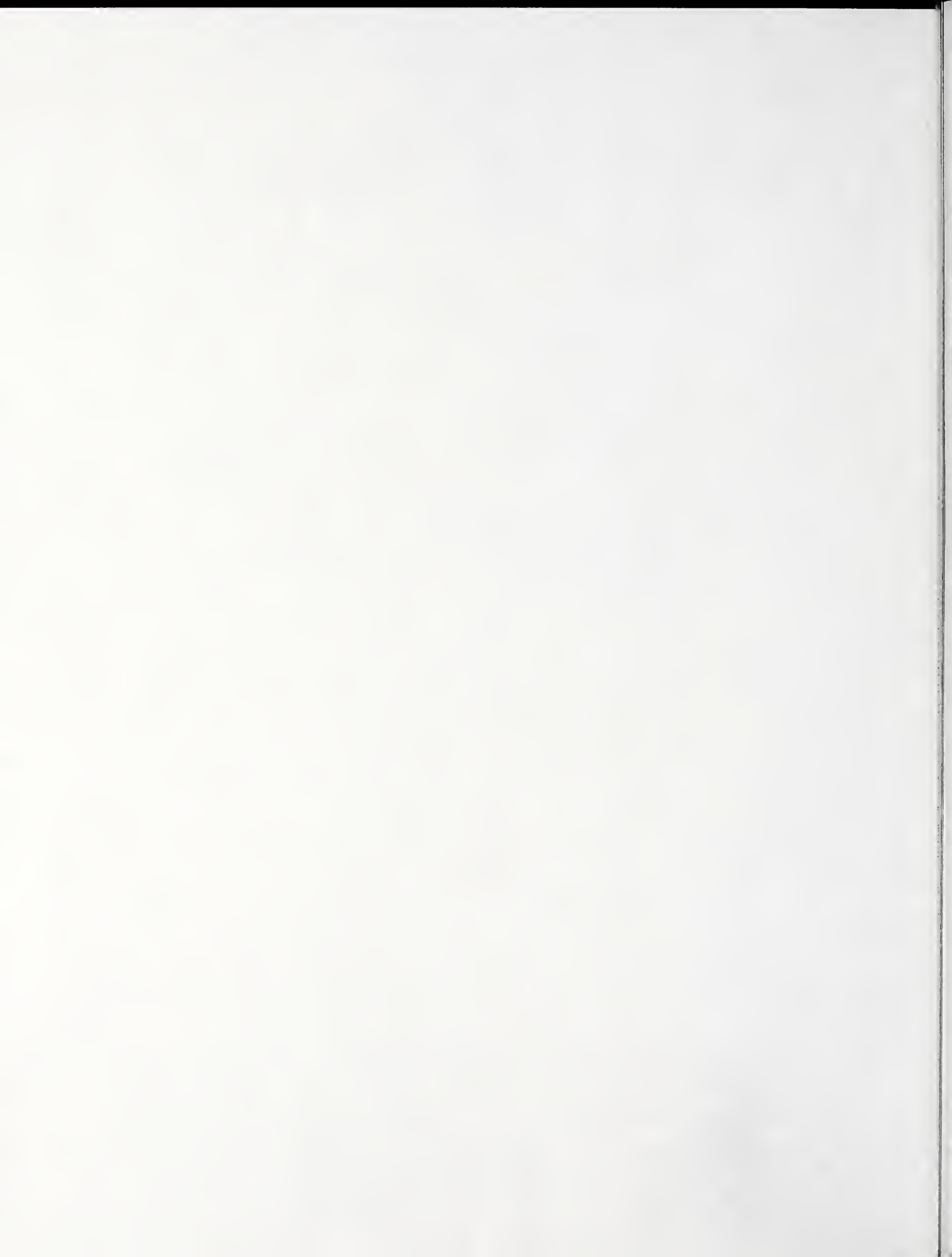
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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Lewis Cass

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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DEATH OF GENERAL CASS.

Hon. Lewis Cass died at Detroit, Michigan, Sunday, the 17th, at the age of eighty-two years. His death, following fast upon that of General Scott, sweeps away almost the last, if not the last, of that galaxy of men whose abilities and continuance in public service built up for us a sort of Elizabethan era of our own.

Mr. Cass was born at Exeter, N. H., October 9, 1782, of old Puritan and revolutionary stock. He studied at the Exeter Academy, made famous by Daniel Webster's pupillage as well as his own, until 1799. His father, who rose to be a major in the Federal army, removed to Wilmington, Del., in 1799, and young Lewis taught there for a while. Then he removed with his parents to Marietta, Ohio, was admitted to the bar, and opened an office at Zanesville in 1802. In 1806 he was elected to the Legislature, and aided in breaking up Burr's great western expedition. He was then made United States Marshal for Ohio. In 1812 he was chosen colonel of the 3d Ohio volunteers in the war with Great Britain, and served with General Hull. He entered Canada, and when Hull made his capitulation, broke his sword in anger. He was exchanged, and made Colonel in the regular army in 1813, and promoted to Brigadier General. He was with Harrison and in the battle of the Thames. Subsequently he was appointed Governor of the Territory of Michigan, with about 5000 white inhabitants. He quieted the Indians by treaty in 1814, and the next year moved to Detroit, where he purchased 500 acres of land. He was made Superintendent over some 40,000 Indians, and secured their confidence and kept the peace. In 1817 he secured the cession of 4,000,000 acres of Indian lands, and in 1819 of 6,000,000 acres more in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. Schoolcraft's Exploring Expedition was framed by him. In 1821 he extinguished the Indian title in Michigan. By 1831 he had made 19 Indian treaties, and published articles on the Indian races which drew attention to him. In 1831 General Jackson, reconstructing his Cabinet, made General Cass Secretary of War, and the Secretary advocated the removal of the Indians. In 1836 he was sent as Minister to France, where his diplomacy was successful, and the next year he travelled extensively along the coasts of the Mediterranean. He was a friend of Louis Philippe, and signalized himself by assailing the treaty of 1841, which was by his efforts frustrated. The Ashburton treaty led to his resignation. On his return General Cass pronounced in favor of the annexation of Texas, and was a candidate for the Presidency against Mr. Polk in 1844. He was chosen Senator from Michigan in 1845, and took high ground on the Oregon question, opposing the treaty by which the Whigs settled it. The Mexican war followed fast on the heels of this adjustment, and his Nicholson letter of December, 1847, proposed to leave the question of slavery in the States to

be acquired from Mexico to be settled by themselves. He then opposed the Wilmot proviso, which he had previously approved. In 1848, he was nominated by the Democrats for President at the Baltimore Convention, but was defeated by Gen. Taylor owing to a secession of Mr. Van Buren's friends in New York. In 1849 he was re-elected by his State to the senatorship, which he resigned when accepting the nomination for the Presidency. He then argued the doctrine of State instructions to representatives, opposing the Wilmot proviso as unconstitutional. In 1850 he belonged to Mr. Clay's Compromise Committee, and joined hands with Mr. Webster and other political opponents, though opposed to the clause for rendering back fugitive slaves. He was re-elected to the Senate in 1851, and was again a candidate for the Presidency in 1852, when General Pierce was nominated. When Mr. Douglas introduced the Kansas-Nebraska bill, in 1854, General Cass opposed it, as calculated to renew dangerous difficulties, and only gave his assent when the principles of the Nicholson letter were applied to the new States, leaving them to approve or exclude slavery. The Republican party, organized in opposition to slavery and the principles of this bill, led to his defeat as a Senator from Michigan. He was not a candidate for the Presidency at the Cincinnati Convention in 1856, and was appointed Secretary of State by Mr. Buchanan in 1857. In this position he secured from Great Britain an assent to his theory on the marine right of visit, and transacted much other business of an important character. For the last few years, worn out by age and oppressed with its infirmities, he, like General Scott, whose death is so soon followed by his own, had retired from public notice. In the great emergency of the country, however, the old statesman followed his own judgment rather than party creed, and took strong and high ground in favor of the war. He may not, perhaps, be said to have left his party, and yet his language and opinions framed themselves well into the platform of Union conduct.

General Cass was about the last, if not the very last, of a school of great men which was controlling for a long time. Clay, Webster, Calhoun, Marcy, Buchanan, Everett, Benton, Wright—these and such as these were his competitors, and if he did not stand as chief in such a galaxy, it is certain that he occupied the most distinguished secondary place. He was a man of more than ordinary cultivation, and politics did not wean him from successful attention to literature. In person he was not imposing, and had a heavy and lethargic appearance, which was dispelled only on important occasions. His intimate relations to the affairs of the country for a long period will cause his death to be greatly noticed, though he has so long lived retired from active exertions.



Pioneering



LEWIS CASS
MICHIGAN'S GREATEST STATESMAN

A MAGAZINE OF DETROIT AND MICHIGAN

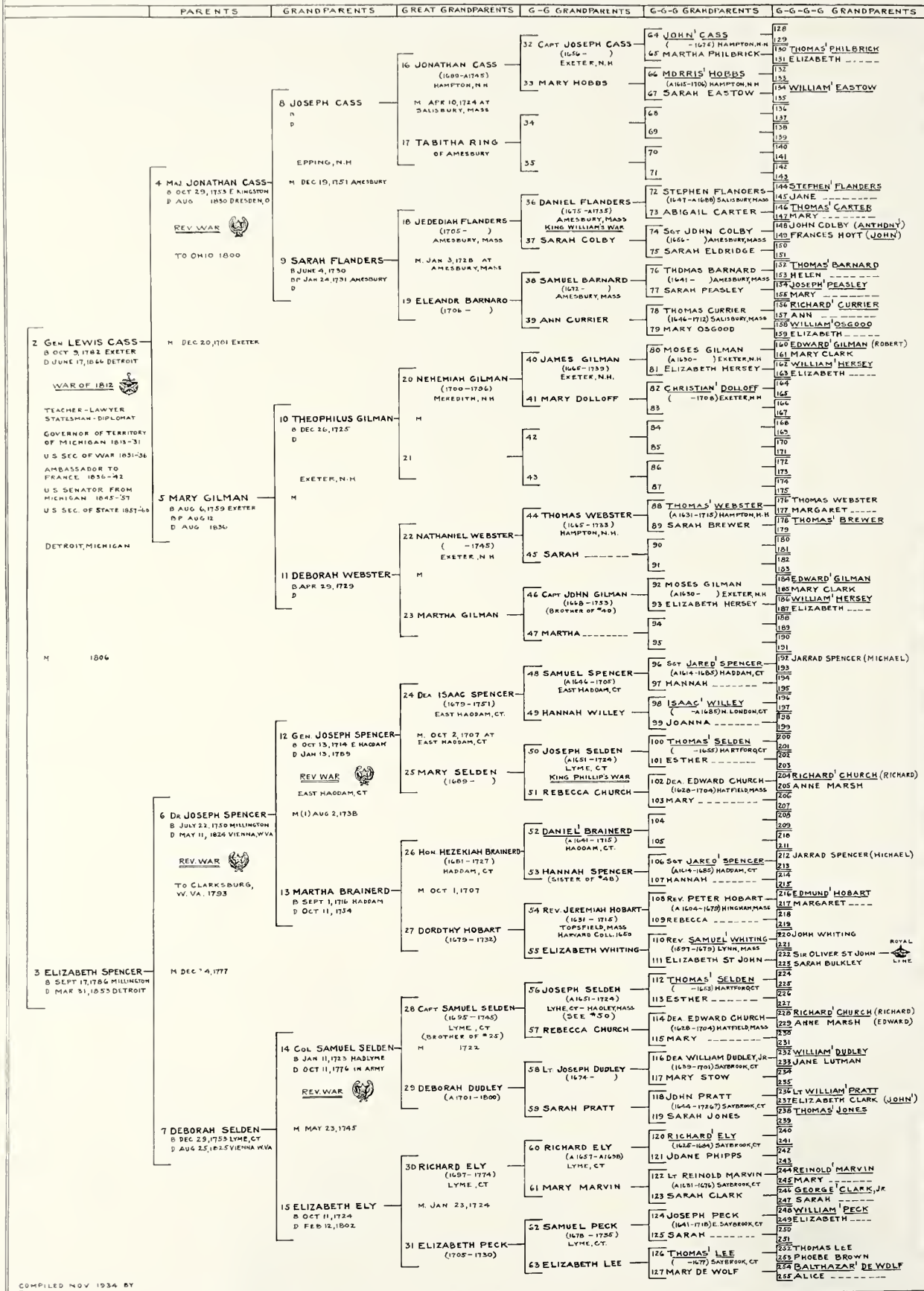
WINTER, 1935



TWENTY CENTS



LINEAL ASCENDANTS OF GENERAL LEWIS CASS OF DETROIT AND HIS WIFE ELIZABETH SPENCER



COMPILED NOV 1934 BY
ELIJAH H. OWEN, DETROIT.



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Burton Historical Collection

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M. M. QUAAFE, *Editor*

LEWIS CASS, STATESMAN

Cass Avenue runs northward from Woodbridge Street to Grand Boulevard. It marks the eastern boundary of the Cass farm and, along with Cass Park and Cass High School, constitutes the city's chief memorial to her most distinguished son. Outside Detroit, a dozen cities and towns, several rivers and lakes, streets in numerous cities, and nine counties in as many different states are named in his honor. Apparently his memory is in no great danger of perishing, but each generation has to learn its history anew, and the time is opportune to dwell upon the varied and immense services performed by Cass for his city, his commonwealth, his section, and his nation.

Lewis Cass was born at Exeter, N. H., October 9, 1782; he died at Detroit, June 17, 1866. His life coincided almost exactly, therefore, with the life of the nation from the attainment of independence in 1783 until the close of the Civil War in 1865. Later generations have come to regard this period of our national development as a sort of heroic age, and with it the career of Cass is intimately and prominently associated.

At the age of ten, Cass entered the local academy, where another pupil bore the name of Daniel Webster. A few years later, Cass became a school teacher, finding his way in this capacity to the State of Delaware. Meanwhile, his father had migrated to the still-infant Northwest Territory, where he established his permanent home near present-day Zanesville, Ohio. In 1799, young Lewis crossed the mountains to rejoin his parents. Soon after his westward migration, Cass determined upon a legal career and began the study of law in the office of Matthew Backus, a Marietta attorney. It is significant to note, in view of Cass's subsequent political and literary eminence, that his formal schooling was but slight, and that at this time he was regarded by his acquaintances as somewhat uncouth in manner and bearing. In March, 1803, his meager legal preparation ended and, although still a minor, he was admitted to the bar at Marietta. Three years later, when barely twenty-four, he was elected to the Ohio legislature. The Aaron Burr Conspiracy was then in process of exposure, and since much of its background was associated with Marietta, it created a great stir in Ohio. Although Cass was the youngest member of the legislature, he sponsored an address of loyalty to the President which was adopted by a unanimous vote. This came to the attention of President Jefferson, who promptly rewarded his youthful champion by appointing him U. S. marshal for Ohio.

This office he continued to hold until the War of 1812. During these years, he continued his legal practice, acquiring an enviable reputation at the bar and achieving local prominence as legislator and politician. More important, perhaps, he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit of frontier democracy. When, in June, 1812, the nation declared war upon Great Britain, Detroit became the focal point of operations in the West. Ohio was called upon for soldiers to march to the defense of Detroit, and Cass, who promptly volunteered for military service, was appointed colonel of one of the three militia regiments which constituted the bulk of Governor Hull's army.

That anyone prominently identified with Hull's disastrous campaign could emerge from it with credit is in itself a sufficiently remarkable fact. Yet Cass succeeded in doing this and, upon the ruin of General Hull's reputation, he laid the foundation of his future career as Michigan's foremost son. In time of war, reputations are made or destroyed with a rapidity unknown to the more humdrum days of peace. In a few short months, Cass became a brigadier general in the United States army, and a figure of national importance. He acquired the confidence of the Administration and, following the victory of the Thames, in September, 1813, was appointed governor of Michigan Territory.

Thus, amid the chaos of war, was begun an executive rule as remarkable as any in American history. Not until the summer of 1831 did Cass lay down the governorship to become a trusted member of President Jackson's Cabinet. His task as governor was delicate and arduous. Detroit was but a village, still predominantly French in composition, with its citizens impoverished and its commerce prostrated by the war. Although the armies presently departed for other fields, the hostile Indian population remained a constant menace to the townsmen. With but the scantiest of resources, Cass addressed himself to the task of protecting and inspiring his charges. Although "duties pressed upon him in battalions," his courage never faltered. He distributed public stores among the needy to save them from actual starvation, and, in person, led armed bands of citizens against marauding parties of Indians who were murdering the townsmen even in the heart of present-day Detroit. For almost twenty years, as governor, he held the unbroken confidence of the authorities at Washington and, because of this fact, was able to command their approval and support for the measures which the welfare of this frontier region required.

The territory Cass ruled embraced all of present-day Michigan and Wisconsin, together with northwestern Minnesota. Most of the vast region was a wilderness, of course, but even so it had its inhabitants and its problems of government, and the vision of the busy Governor was broad enough to embrace the interests of red men and white alike. With remarkable physical energy, he engaged in frequent extended journeys in bark canoe or on horseback, holding councils and treaties with the natives from the banks of the Maumee

to the shores of Lake Superior and the distant sources of the Mississippi. Always uppermost in his mind was the idea of upholding the dignity and promoting the interest of the nation he represented. Yet his devotion to his own government did not prevent Cass from winning the respect and even the affection of the natives. His foresight in other fields of administration is illustrated by his efforts to teach the French farmers better methods of husbandry, and to develop roads and other agencies of industry and civilization. As a promoter of highways in Michigan, his record remained unmatched until the era of the automobile.

At Washington, where Cass remained for five years as Secretary of War, he was one of President Jackson's most trusted advisers, and when ill-health compelled his withdrawal from the Cabinet, his grateful chief appointed him minister to France. There he remained six years, during which time no less than four presidents occupied the White House. At Paris he won the friendship of the King to such a degree that he stirred the jealousy of other foreign representatives; he wrote numerous serious and scholarly articles upon the people and places observed by him in his travels; and he sturdily upheld, as of old in the western wilderness, the dignity of his country against the aggressions, in particular, of the British government. His vigorous opposition to the pretensions of England to exercise the right of search of American vessels at sea finally brought him into conflict with Daniel Webster, his old-time schoolmate, who was now Secretary of State. In the quarrel which ensued mighty blows were dealt, and Cass did not come out second best. Years later, as Secretary of State in Buchanan's Cabinet, he had the satisfaction of obtaining from the British government a public acknowledgment of the abandonment of its pretensions in this particular matter.

The returning minister was greeted with an outburst of popular acclaim which qualified him at once for the presidential race of 1844. Soon it became apparent that he was easily the foremost candidate for the Democratic nomination, with the practical certainty of an easy victory at the polls. But astute wire-pullers succeeded in bestowing the nomination upon James K. Polk, the first "dark-horse" candidate of American presidential history. The people of Michigan thereupon sent Cass to the Senate, where his colleague was William Woodbridge, his boyhood friend and long-time associate in the government of Michigan Territory.

As Polk's presidential term drew to a close, Cass was nominated by the Democratic party to succeed him. The outstanding issue was the question of the extension of slavery. Since this was a sectional issue, and the two great political parties were national in extent, both were much embarrassed by it. The Whigs solved the problem by nominating General Taylor, a slaveholder and a war hero, and maintaining strict silence on the paramount question of the day. The Democrats nominated Cass, whose chief bid for the election was the doctrine of "squatter sovereignty," which meant for the nation to leave to

the regions immediately concerned the decision whether they would have slavery or not. This was a compromise, essentially an evasion, of the question, whose decision was referred to the field of arms a dozen years later. Its postponement for such a period was undoubtedly an advantage to the Union cause, and for this the nation is deeply indebted to Cass. The result of the election turned on the vote of the state of New York, where a schism in the Democratic ranks threw the electoral vote to Taylor and the Whig ticket. Therewith Cass lost the best opportunity he ever had of attaining the presidency, to which he came closer than any other Michigan man has ever come.

Although Cass was still to play a great rôle in our national life, the years which followed 1848 were for him a period of decline and anti-climax. A great nationalist, he sought to meet the sectional issue by compromising between the claims of the contending factions. The time was now approaching when the country refused longer to temporize. Lincoln was elected President in 1860 and civil war followed. Naturally, as the country gave its allegiance to the new set of radical leaders, the older order passed from the stage. Clay and Webster had conveniently died just at the dawn of the new era. It was the misfortune of Cass and Buchanan that they lived on to witness their erstwhile followers desert them in favor of the newer and stranger gods.

Yet the closing years of Cass's public career were wholly worthy of the aging warrior. A dozen years before secession from the Union became a fact, he had publicly proclaimed that if it were ever attempted by violence his own West would "rise up as one man to stay a deed so fatal to the cause of liberty here and throughout the world," and he further foretold that the effort to destroy the Union would fail. As Secretary of State in Buchanan's Cabinet from 1857 to 1860, he exerted all his influence to counteract the designs of secession schemers, and when Buchanan refused to accept his advice to strengthen the forts at Charleston, he resigned his office, in December, 1860. Three months later Lincoln entered the White House, the attempt to reinforce the forts was made, and the Civil War was on.

Cass was now almost eighty years old, and in the gloom of this zero hour his old-time confidence in the perpetuity of the Union temporarily vanished. "I saw the Constitution born," he said to James A. Garfield, who was destined to become a future president, "and I fear I may see it die." Instead, he lived to witness the fulfillment of his old-time prophecy that any attempt to disrupt the Union by violence would fail.

Detroit was Cass's home for over half a century. Here he achieved private wealth and national fame. He served his city and state ably, and the community rewarded generously his service. In a generation of outstanding public leaders, he played creditably a foremost

rôle. The publication of his papers is a civic obligation which still remains unperformed. When this shall be done, posterity will recognize Cass, as did his contemporary generation, as the peer of the "great triumvirate," Calhoun, Clay, and Webster.

JUDGE WOODWARD LOOKS DOWN UPON HIS STREET

A great man and a unique opportunity came together at Detroit in the summer of 1805. The old town, laid out a century before, had burned down—so utterly that not a single house remained—when the Governor and Judges appeared on the scene to establish the government of Michigan Territory. Fresh from Washington and thoroughly familiar with the ideas of Major L'Enfant, Judge Woodward saw in Detroit's calamity a heaven-sent opportunity to rebuild the town on a new plan which would free the future metropolis from the pains and vexations which haphazard city development always entails.

Thus, with Detroit a clear slate, he proceeded to devise the finest and most comprehensive plan any city has ever had. Chiefly it was characterized by an abundance of radial streets and broad avenues, with frequent open spaces for markets, parks, and other public uses. Today one may see in down-town Detroit the mutilated fragment of the initial unit of the Woodward plan, which its originator intended to be expanded indefinitely to cover the growing city, however extensive its area might become. Yet Charles Moore, chairman for twenty years of the National Commission of Fine Arts, which directs the beautification of Washington, referring only to this mutilated fragment, characterizes Detroit as having the most interesting plan of any American city, saving only Washington. Had Judge Woodward's design been adhered to, not even this exception need be made.

Central to the entire Woodward plan was Woodward Avenue, 200 feet wide, which for the present was laid out only as far as Grand Circus Park. In the subsequent extension of the city, both park and avenue were mutilated, the latter being reduced to the dimensions of a country lane, from whose northward extension even the name of Woodward was withheld. Today, we are seeking, at vast expenditure of labor and money, to restore to the street a fraction of the magnificence for which it was originally destined. From Milwaukee to Putnam it has been widened to 120 feet; while southward from Putnam the removal or demolition of business structures goes steadily forward to establish a similar width in this section. Ultimately, at an expenditure of millions of dollars, a 120-foot width from the river to Grand Boulevard will be attained. Forever the street will twist and turn, however, since the engineers in charge of the widening have deemed it impracticable to remove the existing frontage of such buildings as St. Paul's Ca-

thedral and the Maccabees Building, and instead are bending the street, wherever necessary, to swing around them.

From the Valhalla to which all great souls go, Judge Woodward looks down upon his street with mingled pride and chagrin: pride in the belated recognition of the wisdom of his original plan for it; chagrin over the stupidity of the generations which first frittered it away, and which now belatedly seek to recover a mere portion of that which a century ago was so heedlessly rejected.

HIGH TAXES IN 1767

Death and taxes are always with us, and business depressions are no new thing in the life of Detroit. Exactly 168 years ago the townsmen were undergoing the combined inflictions of a business depression and excessive taxation, and against the latter they made a spirited protest to the British officer who was then Detroit's local ruler. "In all time," they asserted, "the citizens and farmers of Detroit have counted it a duty to conform . . . to the orders and will of their Commandants. You have proved it yourself in all that you have required whether for the works or the different taxes that you have thought necessary for the weal of your government. Permit us then, Sir, if you please, today to make some representations on the impossibility of complying with your new orders of the 6th inst . . . You know, Sir, that the sorrowful and deplorable situation we are reduced to, with the general want of money and the languishing condition our trade is in, takes from us the means of satisfying your demands.

"Captain Campbell, the first English commander at Detroit, on his arrival (in 1761) levied a tax on the proprietors in the fort for the lodgement of the troops which amounted to a very considerable sum, and each of the farmers had to pay a cord of wood per acre in front; the second year he caused the proprietors to pay again for the lodgement of the troops, and each farmer had to pay two cords of wood per acre in front. The third year Colonel Gladwin continued the same taxes. And in the year 1763 the tax for the fort alone amounted to 2770 livres, equal to £184.13.4 N. Y. C.; and in the year 1764 to 2370 livres or £158. In the year 1765 Colonel Campbell caused to be published by Messrs. Baby and Chapoton that the taxes were at an end, that the people should pay in future as in the time of the French king, which is two sous per foot in front for the inhabitants in the fort, and 2 shillings 8 pence and ½ of a bushel of wheat per acre in front by the farmers. . . In 1766 [notwithstanding], Colonel Campbell laid on a tax of 1 shilling per foot in front for each lot within the fort, and 2 shillings per acre in front for the farmers in the country, great part of which had already

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